

## CELEBRATING SUCCESS: JOURNEY THROUGH DSWD CONVERGENCE STRATEGY

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**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this study was to evaluate the living conditions of individuals both prior to and following their participation in the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) convergence program. Additionally, the study sought to delve into the success stories of the participants and gather insights to inspire the broader public. Utilizing a multiple case study design, the research involved five carefully selected participants from the DSWD convergence program, chosen in accordance with predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. Data collection conducted through in-depth interviews, and the gathered information was subsequently analyzed using Nvivo8 software. Themes related to living conditions before availing of the program included abject poverty, being debt-ridden, residing in pitiable shelters, having limited exposure and humdrum existence, facing poor employment opportunities, and experiencing constrained family relationships. Success stories revealed participants could broaden their horizons and spread their wings, develop as individuals, acquire additional skills, improve family relationships, and access better employment opportunities. Insights gathered highlighted the importance of investing in the education of Filipino youth, focusing on the development of Filipino families, fostering community unity, providing livelihood opportunities, and emphasizing prudent and faithful utilization of government funds. While the country's fight against poverty is ongoing, the success stories suggest that the government is making progress by maximizing the impact of its poverty reduction efforts through an effective targeting system, integrated case management, and a holistic community development approach. These findings may assist development agencies in revisiting strategies for implementing social welfare and social protection programs and policies aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals.

**KEYWORDS:** social work, celebrating success, convergence strategy, multiple case study, 4Ps beneficiaries, Philippines.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty, an enduring and widespread challenge throughout history, necessitates strategic responses for eradication. The United Nations (2020) emphasizes the crucial need for significant resource mobilization to comprehensively implement programs and policies addressing poverty. Implementation involves creating sound policy frameworks rooted in pro-poor and gender-sensitive development strategies at all levels to facilitate accelerated investment in poverty eradication interventions. While the Philippines, like other third-world countries, has grappled with poverty, progress toward Sustainable Development Goal 1 has faltered globally, putting the 2030 target in jeopardy (United Nations, 2020). Various strategies have been employed to combat poverty, yet the pace of progress remains a concern. The solution lies in concerted efforts from both government and development partners, requiring proper funding, community empowerment, and innovative strategies. The Asian Development Bank (2016) underscores the importance of social mobilization, community participation, and the accountability of stakeholders to address this multifaceted issue.

Amid numerous studies on poverty reduction, a notable gap exists concerning the experiences of beneficiaries of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Convergence Strategy, particularly in Maasim, Sarangani Province, within Region 12. To bridge this gap, the researcher aims to describe the living conditions of participants before and after availing of the three core convergence programs,

document success stories, and extract insights from program participants. The study's outcomes will serve as a foundation for evaluating and refining existing DSWD programs, policies, and guidelines, benefitting DSWD personnel and Local Government Units (LGUs) in implementing convergent community projects. Furthermore, the study's findings will contribute to the community beneficiaries and other stakeholders by providing inspiration and fostering cooperation toward achieving government goals. Additionally, the results will benefit the researcher by serving as a basis for information dissemination in seminars and offering a blueprint for future researchers interested in relevant studies.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This study aims to comprehensively assess the impact of DSWD's Convergence Program on beneficiaries, shedding light on their evolving living conditions, success stories, and insights. The Research seeks to provide a coherent understanding of the program's effectiveness and implications for poverty reduction efforts through cross-case analysis.

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

DSWD has demonstrated a keen understanding of its challenges, evident in formulating a Convergence Framework and Action Plan for Social Protection. This initiative drew on inputs from diverse stakeholders, including government bodies, civil society, and the private sector, collected through regional consultations in Davao, Cebu, Baguio, and Tagaytay, as well as a workshop involving the Sub-committee on Social Protection, academicians, DSWD officials, attached agencies, and other national stakeholders (Asian Development Bank, 2010; Villar, 2013).

Aligned with DSWD's sectoral outcomes, the Convergence Strategy emerges as a critical strategy, emphasizing the pooling of efforts and resources from various stakeholders to address the needs of the poor and disadvantaged. Comprising three core programs – the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (a conditional cash transfer), the Sustainable Livelihood Program, and the Kalahi-CIDSS program – DSWD aims to maximize impact towards its strategic objectives contributing to the SDGs (DSWD, 2016).

The convergence of programs, initiated in 2012 across 40 municipalities, involves KALAHY-CIDSS, Pantawid Pamilya, and the Sustainable Livelihood Program. Notably, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps) gained prominence in 2008 as a pivotal social measure (Dungog-Cuizon & Cuizon, 2016). Key activities facilitating program convergence include a unified targeting system (the National Household Targeting System for Poverty Reduction or Listahanan), synchronized implementation of social preparation and mobilization, harmonized engagement of Local Government Units, coordinated capability building, harmonized monitoring and reporting, integrated Social Case Management, and enhanced partnership with Civil Society Organizations (DSWD, NEDA, SDC, 2012).

Convergence efforts from 2011 to 2019 have positively impacted the well-being of beneficiaries, as evidenced by the winners of the annual search for "huwaring pantawid pamilya" since 2012. These winners display significant improvements in their well-being, acting as inspirations to their peers. The DSWD's annual reports highlight success stories, such as a formerly homeless family in Quezon City finding stability through converging programs. Additionally, a Pantawid Pamilya youth in Quezon City realized educational aspirations through collaboration with the International Holistic Engagement for Life and Progress (I-HELP), a Civil Society Organization partnered with DSWD-NCR. The program's design aims to bridge the gap between the rich and poor by providing enabling conditions for the latter, a fundamental aspect of any development initiative. Further, affirming the success of the convergence strategy, the 2019-2020 Social Welfare and Development Indicators (SWDI) report indicates a 15.56% increase in the self-sufficiency level, signifying improved well-being among program beneficiaries (DSWD, 2021). These accomplishments underscore the effectiveness of DSWD's Convergence Framework in addressing poverty and promoting inclusive development.

### III. METHODOLOGY

The researcher employed a qualitative multiple case study method to explore the effects of the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) Convergence Strategy on the lives of five (5) beneficiaries. Qualitative Research, as explained by Englander (2012), focuses on delving deeply into the core of experiences to understand the essence of a phenomenon, aligning with influential psychologists like Freud, Piaget, and Skinner, who built theories on minimal subject samples without extensive statistical analysis (Giorgi, 2009). The choice of qualitative methodology was apt for investigating the impact of the convergence strategy on beneficiaries, aiming to gather first-hand data through participant experiences (Holloway & Wheeler, 2010; Suter, 2006). The qualitative approach minimizes assumptions, enhancing research precision (Starks & Trinidad, 2007; Taylor, 2012; Tufford & Newman, 2010). The study sought to understand how participants interpreted their experiences and attributed meaning to them (Merriam, 2009).

Creswell's (2007) recommendation for an in-depth exploration guided the use of the case study approach, allowing a profound understanding of human perceptions and experiences. Case study, emphasizing the study of human events or phenomena in real-world contexts, was deemed adequate for uncovering the essence of experiences through extensive discussions (Campbell, 2011; Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2000; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007; Willis, 2011). A cross-case analysis was utilized to understand multiple case similarities and differences (Yin, 2009; Cruzes et al., 2015). Data sources included interviews, observations, and documents (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 2009; Locke et al., 2010; Suter, 2012). Data collection, guided by Creswell's (2007) steps, involved identifying participants, sending letters of invitation and informed consent, arranging interviews, conducting in-depth interviews, and confirming notes with participants. Following Patton's (2000) approach, content analysis aided in interpreting the vast data and extracting core themes and patterns using Nvivo8 for coding. Trustworthiness was ensured through rapport-building for credibility, leaving personal biases aside for confirmability, providing transparent details for transferability, and ensuring consistency for dependability (Creswell, 2002).

### IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### **Living Conditions of the Participants Before and After Availing the Convergence Program of the DSWD**

In the first theme of abject poverty, beneficiaries recounted severe deprivation in fundamental human needs, such as food, health, shelter, and education. The United Nations defines abject poverty as a condition marked by the severe lack of basic human necessities, not solely contingent on income but also access to essential services. The idea aligns with the Philippines' highest poverty incidence compared to neighboring countries, which is attributed to inadequate poverty reduction efforts, program implementation shortcomings, and the short lifespan of initiatives (Reyes and Valencia, 2004).

The subsequent themes highlight the participants' challenges with overwhelming debt, pitiable shelter conditions, limited exposure in their community, poor employment opportunities, and constrained family relationships. These conditions, encapsulated in terms like "debt-ridden," "pitiable shelter," "limited exposure and humdrum existence," "poor employment opportunities," and "constrained family relationships," collectively underscore the multifaceted impact of poverty on individuals and families. These observations resonate with existing studies, emphasizing poor money management, substandard living conditions, restricted community engagement, underemployment challenges, and strained family dynamics in the face of financial difficulties (Lunja, 2017; Habitat for Humanity, 2020; Chohan, 2016; Erdogan and Bauer, 2019; Garcia, 2018).

#### **Living Conditions of the Participants After Availing the Convergence Program of the DSWD**

The themes that emerged in this section showed the ability to afford children's education signifies that parents can now cover school fees projects and provide fare money, successfully sending their children through college. The theme resonates with the Philippine government's 4Ps program, which grants conditional cash to marginalized families to enhance children's health, nutrition, and education (Reyes et al., 2013). Raquiza (2018) and Fiszbein et al. (2019) affirm that the 4Ps effectively disrupt the poverty cycle by supplementing household beneficiaries' financial resources.

Furthermore, participants highlighted improvements in meeting daily basic needs, such as sufficient and exceptional food, better clothing, concrete houses, and electricity meters. Godfrey and Kalache (2019) assert that the convergence program fosters economic self-sufficiency, enabling families to consistently meet their needs across various domains. Families supported by the program can weather periods of unemployment, maintain personal savings, and navigate job losses with the flexibility to seek alternative employment or upgrade their education and skills without severe hardship.

### **Success Stories Which Participants Can Share to Inspire the Public**

In this section, the participants are "Able to Broaden Horizon and Spread Wings," they highlighted how involvement in convergence strategy programs allowed them to engage and actively assume more prominent roles in their community. This participation boosted their self-esteem and confidence, enabling them to interact with diverse individuals and take on leadership roles in their barangay. Findings from Ginson-Bautista & Yap's (2020) study support these experiences, indicating that families surveyed under the convergence program enhanced their socialization, particularly mothers who actively engaged in various activities and took on leadership roles in addressing barangay concerns.

In the theme "Developed as a Person and Learned Additional Skills," participants emphasized the significant impact of training and seminars on their personal development, expanding their knowledge on issues such as gender equality and rights. These experiences also led to personality development, enabling them and their husbands to acquire additional skills in dressmaking, masonry, and electrical installation. The intensified implementation of the convergence program, as Yu (2012) suggested, yielded positive effects on personal development, allowing family members to devote more time to honing their abilities and creating additional employment opportunities, ultimately improving family income.

### **Insights that Can be Drawn from the Participants of the Convergence Program**

Participants shared insights into core programs under the DSWD convergence strategy. They said they understood the program's purpose, notably the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, modeled after Latin American conditional cash transfer programs. The experience demonstrated a tangible investment in human development, aligning with the DSWD's claim that the convergence program breaks the poverty cycle in Filipino households by boosting children's school enrollment and reducing child labor.

Secondly, participants delved into the Convergence Program's impact on the development of Filipino individuals. Participants highlighted the importance of imparting crucial family values and responsibilities, emphasizing quality time spent with family and proper child-rearing. The DSWD Annual Report 2011 highlighted inclusive growth and improved lives through equitable access to quality social services. The program's success fosters self-reliance and contributes to Filipino people's development.

Lastly, all study participants shared common insights and expressed optimism that if all beneficiaries of convergent programs apply the lessons they learned, there will be improved prospects for enhancing their living conditions. They unanimously highlighted the program's multifaceted impact, emphasizing its role as an investment in the education of Filipino youth, its concern for the development of Filipino families, its ability to unite communities, its provision of livelihood opportunities, and, critically, the importance of prudent and faithful utilization of government funds. These findings align with Sanchez's (2018) assertion that while cash grants and benefits from 4Ps may alleviate financial concerns, they may still be insufficient or not adequately managed based on the recipient's specific needs.

## **V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION**

In conclusion, the findings underscore the vital role of programs and the convergence strategy in mitigating poverty among Filipinos. The prevalence of high poverty rates significantly impacts nutrition and literacy, highlighting the crucial role of cash assistance in addressing program implementation challenges, including insufficient information to support national and local-level poverty reduction initiatives. Shelters serve as tangible indicators of poverty, encompassing social and material deprivation and limited employment opportunities. The implementation of the convergence program has proven transformative for beneficiaries,

enabling them to afford children's education, fulfill basic needs, and make meaningful investments, ultimately restoring dignity to marginalized communities.

While the nation's battle against poverty remains an ongoing challenge, success stories from conditional cash transfer grantees indicate that the government has made strides in maximizing the impact of poverty reduction and social protection programs. This success is attributed to an effective targeting system, integrated case management, and a holistic community development approach. The study affirms that conditional cash transfers yield positive outcomes, as healthier and better-educated individuals break the cycle of poverty by securing improved employment opportunities.

Funds and technical assistance have expanded the program and enhanced systems and capacities. Given the positive study results, the researcher strongly advocates for a unified effort across all government agencies, encompassing the entire nation, civil society organizations, and private corporations in the fight against poverty. The convergence strategy emerges as a valuable tool in achieving one or, ideally, multiple sustainable development goals.

While the study results avoid making broad generalizations, they offer a valuable opportunity to document significant success stories and insights from beneficiaries of the DSWD convergence programs. This documentation sheds light on their living conditions before and after the program's availability, providing valuable information for public sharing. The insights gathered may assist the DSWD and other stakeholders in refining strategies for implementing social welfare and protection programs aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG number 1 - the goal to end poverty in all its forms everywhere by 2030 (United Nations, 2015). The study identified six significant themes before the availability of the program. There were three major themes after its availability, four major themes in success stories, and five major themes in insights. The study enhances community awareness and understanding of the availability of the convergence program. It also prompts DSWD personnel to review poverty reduction strategies, ensuring regular evaluations of program effectiveness and proper utilization of cash assistance by beneficiaries. Additionally, it guides local government units, encouraging the expansion of program areas to include education, livelihood, employable skills improvement, social security, water and sanitation, family role performance, family awareness, and pertinent social issues.

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